

Tuesday, July 30, 2019



GSA InSite

## Gender Roles

By

[Madeline Caliendo](#)– June 26, 2017 Posted in: [Uncategorized](#)

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I read a very interesting article recently on social media about Native Americans and gender roles.

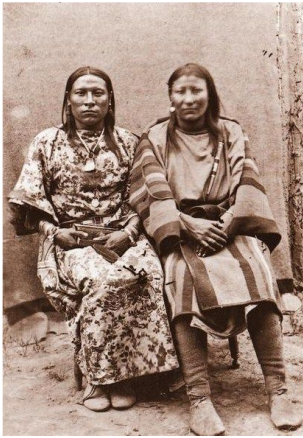
It said that prior to the influence of Europeans in North America, Native Americans did not recognize the binary genders and gender roles that we tend to recognize today. Rather, for Native Americans there was no set rules about how men and women had to act in order to be considered a “normal” member of the tribe. Indeed, from what I read it seems that Native Americans who exhibited both female and male characteristics were viewed as gifted by nature, and thus, able to see both sides of everything—in a way more clear headed and balanced.

What I learned is that Native American culture—which is essentially defined by individual tribes—tended to acknowledge between three and five genders and gender roles. Here is a full list of the five.

1. Female
2. Male
3. Two Spirit Female
4. Two Spirit Male
5. Transgendered

For instance, the Navajo people referred to “Two Spirits” as *Nádleehí* (one who is transformed), and for the Lakota it was *Winkté* (a male who has a compulsion to behave like a female), *Niizh Manidoowag* (two spirit) and in Ojibwe, *Hemaneh* (half man, half woman).

Below is a photo of a famous Lakota warrior named “*Finds Them And Kills Them*” (otherwise known as “Osh-Tisch”) Osh-Tisch was born a male and married a female but adorned himself in women’s clothes and lived daily life as a female. On June 17 1876, “*Osh-Tisch*” became famous for bravery after rescuing a fellow tribesman during the “Battle of Rosebud Creek.” Below is a photo of Osh-Tisch” and his wife.



Osh Tisch and his wife

Also of note, a colleague recently shared with me about a book he recently read by historian Yuval Noah Harari titled *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* that shared similar information about gender and gender roles but in the context of the evolution of the human species.

Gender and gender stereotyping is an issue of import in the civil rights arena. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) the Federal agency with responsibility for eradicating workplace discrimination in both the public and private sectors has held that gender stereotyping can be a form of sex-based discrimination under *Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, as amended. You can read more about it here: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/sex.cfm>

June is pride month for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) individuals. It is good that Special Emphasis Groups like the LGBT group have a month of the year to focus a light on their community and issues that are important to them. This month GSA's LGBT group hosted several programs. I hope you attend at least some of them. If not consider learning more about the group on INSITE, Chatter, and/or by connecting to its members.

In the work we are doing in the Office of Civil Rights with Unconscious Bias we know that research shows that when we connect with each other and find even just one or two similarities between us, then what we think of as a mountain of difference tends to melt away.

When that happens we can collaborate more easily and truly bring our best selves to the workplace and the table to serve GSA and the American public.

## 6 Comments

1. [justin.pinkney@gsa.gov](mailto:justin.pinkney@gsa.gov)

Posted June 27, 2017 at 6:50 AM

Great blog entry! Thanks for sharing this information.

[\[Reply\]](#)

2. [renita.nowlin@gsa.gov](mailto:renita.nowlin@gsa.gov)

Posted June 28, 2017 at 3:52 PM

Interesting information. Thanks for sharing. I was in Paris and witnessed their Gay Pride Parade as I was visiting the Louvre. It was an outstanding event and had more people there then the eye could see and I felt like it went forever. Great unexpected experience.

[\[Reply\]](#)

3. [PonderPoint](#)

Posted June 30, 2017 at 4:30 PM

I read this blog and contacted my elders living on the reservations and off reservations in the Carolinas and Virginias. Per those elders, what ever article you read that you are basing this blog on is inaccurate.

My elders stated to me that for the Cherokee, the Eastern tribes, we “accept” that as in nature, there are times when the roles of male and female are not strictly “enforced” but that does not mean that the Cherokee has a carte blanche rule that said (or says) “What ever sex/gender you want to be just be it” . According to the elders, the approach is “We will not try to force you to change but do not try to impose your ways on those who do not feel the same. Seek those who are like minded.”

As for clothing being designated male or female, the elder’s comments were that perhaps Europeans need that designation but for the Eastern Cherokee (and not speaking for any other tribe), clothing was functional except during certain celebrations.

The elders felt that perhaps the writers of these articles are being too broad brush and have not done the due diligence to state clearly that the conclusions and/or information is based on “European interpretations” which may not be precisely what Native Americans were trying to convey to the researchers.

Hopefully that information will help give another perspective to the discussion.

[\[Reply\]](#)

*Madeline Caliendo Reply:*

June 30th, 2017 at 4:43 pm

Thanks for sharing.

[\[Reply\]](#)

#### 4. *Madeline Caliendo*

Posted July 3, 2017 at 4:46 PM

An interesting sidenote... today the Washington Post reported that the District of Columbia is the first jurisdiction in the country to issue a gender-neutral driver’s license. You can read more about it here: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/meet-the-first-person-in-the-country-to-officially-receive-a-gender-neutral-drivers-license/2017/06/30/bcb78afc-5d9a-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.393ac574b3ee](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/meet-the-first-person-in-the-country-to-officially-receive-a-gender-neutral-drivers-license/2017/06/30/bcb78afc-5d9a-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13_story.html?utm_term=.393ac574b3ee)

[\[Reply\]](#)

*Madeline Caliendo Reply:*

July 6th, 2017 at 11:01 am

More interesting news... Oregon also recently started issuing gender neutral driver’s licenses too: <http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/oregon-issues-first-gender-neutral-state-id-cards-n777801>

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